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Syria and the Olympics: National Identity on an International Stage

Abstract

Since its 1946 independence, Syria has fielded a team for every summer Olympic competition except 1956, yet has won only three Olympic medals. In contrast with its smaller, higher-powered neighbor Lebanon, its participation at the Olympics has been consistent but limited, with the country making little impact internationally. Yet the history of Syria's involvement with the Olympics reflects key elements of its political and social history: its ambitious but short-lived partnership with Egypt, the Baathist-supported promotion of women as athletes and head of the National Olympic Committee, and its commitment to participation in the vexed but ideologically important Pan-Arab Games. This article uses official International Olympic Committee publications and related press coverage to examine the history of Syria's involvement with the Olympic Games, the Mediterranean Games, and the Pan-Arab Games. It argues that Syria's participation was initially important not for its medal count but for the "sign of statehood" that membership in the Olympic community conferred, and that its participation in regional games supported Syria's political positions as a Baathist, Arab republic. It concludes by contending that these political commitments have renewed salience as the conflict in Syria that began in March 2011 continues, and the country's participation in Olympic and regional games becomes increasingly politicized.

Keywords

Syria, Olympics, internationalism, Mediterranean Games, Arab Games, statehood, Asad

Introduction

Since becoming independent from French mandatory control in 1946, Syria has sent athletes to every summer Olympic Games – with the exception of the 1956 Melbourne Olympics, when it joined with neighbors Egypt, Iraq, and Lebanon in a boycott to protest foreign involvement in the Suez crisis. A relatively small country – at 71,500 square miles, it is larger than neighbors Jordan and Lebanon but smaller than Egypt, Iran, Iraq, Saudi Arabia, and even Oman and Yemen – Syria had as of June 2013 an estimated 22.5 million people, with roughly 90% Arabs and the rest Armenian, Kurdish, and other minorities, making it a mid-range country population-wise for the region. Religiously, the country’s population is approximately 75% Sunni Muslim, 15% Shii (including Ismaili) Muslims and Druze, 10% Christian, with a handful of Jews remaining from Syria’s historical Jewish population.ⁱ While Syria joined the Olympic community less than two years after attaining independence, it was able to send only one athlete to the 1948 London games: diver Zouheir Chourbagi, who placed tenth in the final round of the 10 meter dive and later worked for Syria’s Ministry of Education.ⁱⁱ Yet while Syria has consistently participated in the summer Olympic Games, it has taken home only three Olympic medals since 1948: silver in 1984, gold in 1996, and bronze in 2004. This disconnect between the country’s commitment to Olympic participation and its “return on investment” with respect to the number of medals won suggests that for Syria, as for many other smaller states around the world, Olympic participation proved meaningful in other ways. (The relatively greater medal counts of states with similar GDPs and populations sizes suggests that Syria’s low medal count may also have reflected domestic factors, whether limited program funding, military dominance of sports training, or insufficient infrastructure – all subjects worthy of investigation in future research.)

Joining the Olympic community in 1948 gave the newly independent Syria, with its weak nationalist government, instant recognition from the global community of sovereign states. As Syria matured and its government (and governing ideologies) shifted with the multiple coups of the 1950s, culminating in the short-lived alliance with Egypt and ending with the 1963 Baathist coup, Syria's involvement in international sporting events consistently reflected and reinforced the country's political positions. Known officially as the Syrian Arab Republic, the country's secular, Arab socialist identity included the promotion of sports at the individual, national, regional, and international level, as a way to construct strong, healthy, modern citizens – a heritage that stretched back to the nationalist youth and men's organizations of the Mandate era. While generally sending fewer than twenty athletes to any Olympic competition,ⁱⁱⁱ the Baathist government's secular ideology may be seen, for example, in its early and consistent inclusion of male and female athletes from Christian and Muslim backgrounds in Olympic cohorts – most notably Ghada Shouaa, an Arab Christian who won the gold medal for the women's heptathlon at the 1996 Summer Games in Atlanta, Georgia. It may also be seen in the government's emphasis on youth sports and physical education – with the latter specifically mentioned in Syria's constitution.^{iv}

Syria's twentieth-century national history runs through its broader efforts to engage with the Olympics and the Olympic Committee as well, intersecting with its shifting commitments in terms of national development and domestic and regional politics. From its political alignment and merger with Egypt in the 1950s and 1960s to its strong support of the Pan-Arab Games and Mediterranean Games from the 1970s through the 1990s, national politics have been closely intertwined with the international in Syria's engagement with international amateur sports. After

outlining that history, this article argues that the political aspect of Syria's international sports activities has become increasingly salient again since the outbreak of the regime-opposition conflict in 2011. It offers a preliminary study, relying chiefly on Olympic Committee publications as primary sources – primarily Olympic Games reports and issues from the *Olympic Review*, the International Olympic Committee's official publication.^v It draws on the work of Middle East historians and sports historians for secondary source analysis, and mapping these elements onto the broader timeline of modern Syrian history. The next step for deepening the historical study will be to investigate this phenomenon from the perspective of Syrian media, and particularly its national newspapers. However, the current political situation and limited microfilming of Syrian newspapers has made this difficult. The next step for the contemporary study depends on political, military, economic, and social developments in Syria, as read in the context of the recent Mediterranean Games in Mersin, Turkey, held in June 2013, and two upcoming amateur sporting events: the Winter Olympic Games in Sochi, Russia, held in February 2014, and the Pan-Arab Games in Beirut, Lebanon, held in Spring 2015.

This article builds on work previously done on Lebanon and its relationship with the Olympic Games: Lebanon and Syria historically and in the present have been sibling countries, starting from similar beginnings as collections of Ottoman provinces sculpted into French mandate territories, but diverging after independence in terms of their developmental trajectories and governmental outlook, while exhibiting key differences in terms of population composition, territorial size, country wealth, and engagement with the outside world. This previous work argued that Lebanon despite its small size and population developed an outsize presence in the international Olympic community, thanks to Lebanese National Olympic Committee head

Gabriel Gemayel, scion of a prominent Maronite Christian family. Gemayel worked tirelessly to promote Lebanon to International Olympic Committee members, and to promote sports and physical activity to Lebanese citizens.^{vi} After his retirement, Lebanon receded in prominence on the international scene – indicating the important role that international sports organizations can play in shaping national identity, as well as their limitations.

Syria, this article argues, followed a more typical path for a country of its size and resources: sending small contingents of athletes to each Games without taking home many medals or having much influence on the Olympic community. Yet its trajectory also illustrates the principle that involvement with international sports organizations can play an important role in the shaping of national identity for late-independence states. Its involvement with the Olympic and regional games, while less outsized than Lebanon's, reflects its national outlook and political history. However, while Lebanon's participation in the Games continued regardless of its domestic situation – the country continued sending athletes from all sects without interruption during its 15-year civil war – for Syria participation in the Games has and continues to have a highly politicized component. The findings of this article suggest the importance of recognizing how even similar initial trajectories – shared Ottoman histories, intertwined French mandate territories, common late-independence time frames, and numerous economic and familial connections – can also result in different pathways. Syria's involvement with the Olympic Games and the Olympic community was far more typical than was Lebanon's – and so is the current embroilment of its sports commitments with its domestic politics.

This article will first offer a brief overview of the history of modern Syria, then discuss the history of Syria's involvement with the Olympics, contrast that with its involvement in several Olympic-affiliated and non Olympic-affiliated regional games, and connect this history with the increased interest – or scrutiny – that attended the country's participation in the Summer 2012 Olympics. It will suggest that Syria's engagement with the Olympics historically was less important politically than its engagement in the regional games, while noting that Syria's involvement with international amateur sports at both levels was more limited than that of its smaller neighbor, Lebanon. It will also suggest that the current conflict in Syria has and will continue to make Syrian participation in future regional and Olympic Games a more salient issue, as indicated by the 'signs of statehood' or national sovereignty notion used to analyze its original participation in the Olympics.

Modern Syrian history: a brief overview

What is recognized today as the country of Syria was historically part of the broader set of provinces or vilayets called in the Ottoman Empire "Bilad al-Sham", or the land of Sham. The use of the term "Sham" to refer to the lands and peoples of greater Syria (a term with some flexibility, but generally including modern Israel, Jordan, Lebanon, Palestine, Syria, and part of Turkey)^{vii} goes back much further in history – to the early days of Islam, when conditions of coexistence were laid out between Omar ibn al-Khattab and the "Christians of Sham", and beyond.^{viii} This region has had a rich history – with layers of cultural influences from various civilizations, political states, economic systems, and religious communities, as well as immigrant populations of various ethnicities. But in 1919, after World War I had ended, Bilad al-Sham and the Ottoman Arab provinces more generally were divided up as British and French mandate

territories. As is well known to modern history, these lands were designated “Class A” mandates: the League of Nations considered the Arab provinces to be territories that, while not quite ready for self-rule, were close, and should be prepared for self-governance rather than ruled as colonies. Britain received Palestine – which it then divided into Palestine and Jordan – and Iraq; and France was given Syria and Lebanon. France in turn amended the borders of its mandate states: expanding those of Lebanon to its present-day borders, ceding a chunk of northwestern Syria to Turkey, and dividing today’s Syria into four states: Damascus, Aleppo, the Alawi region and the Druze region. Syria remained under French governance until 1946, the poorer stepsister to Lebanon in terms of French attention and affection, although much larger in population and territory.^{ix}

With independence and the post-World War II world came new challenges, for Syria as for many post-colonial states. The first eight years after independence were dominated by a series of military coups, with a civilian government under well-known nationalist leader Shukri al-Quwwatli established in 1955. Three years later, he led Syria into the formation of the United Arab Republic, a two-part state with Gamal Abdel Nasser’s Egypt as the dominant partner. This union was supported by the Baath Party, which had been formed in 1947, as a means of reducing Communist influence in Syria and as the catalyst for a broader union of Arab world states. This union reinforced several Syrian national tendencies: the emphasis on Arabism, on secularism, on socialism, and on independent development without a superpower patron. However, Nasser’s nationalization policies, among other issues, turned popular sentiment against the United Arab Republic. In 1961, a group of Alawi Syrian army officers staged a coup and returned Syria to full sovereignty, before themselves being supplanted in a Baathist coup.^x

Three years later, in 1966, an opposition group within the Baath Party staged another coup, bringing to power a government that included Hafez al-Asad as Minister of Defense. This government led Syria through the defeat of the 1967 War, but in 1970 Hafez al-Asad took power from the sitting president – a move ratified by popular vote the following year. After so many years of instability, the durability of Hafez al-Asad’s government is striking – and all the more so given his identity as a member of Syria’s small Alawi minority. He was challenged several times in the early years, but he put down even the greatest threat – the Muslim Brotherhood – with the now-infamous massive retaliatory attack on Hama in 1982. It is his imprint on Syria – as one of the key confrontation states standing against Israel, as a staunch supporter of Arab nationalism and Arab socialism, and as a semi-closed state in terms of imported goods, communications and entertainment media, and political interaction, that his son Bashar al-Asad inherited in 2000.

Research approach: Olympic affiliation as ‘sign of statehood’

This article will return to the story of Bashar al-Asad’s Syria below, but first turns to explain its engagement with a concept that used in two previous studies of other Middle East Mandate states, Palestine and Lebanon: that of the “signs of statehood”. For the first, it applied to signs of impending statehood while Palestine was still under British tutelage; for the second, it applied to signs that the international community recognized newly independent Lebanon as a sovereign state.^{xi} The concept of “signs of statehood”, as articulated by scholar Geoffrey Best, has typically been used by political scientists, journalists, historians, and – on the ground - NGO workers, as a means of assessing the effective sovereignty of a particular state or territory.^{xii} Often, the signs scrutinized have been domestic: practical issues like having one functional and universally

recognized currency, for example, or identity-building signs like having and using a national anthem.

On the international level, acceptance for membership in the United Nations has been seen as the defining sign of statehood – supplying legitimacy crucial for national leaders seeking self-determination, and useful later as a foundation from which to project particular national identities or establish regional or international influence. Best argues that recognition of a national Red Cross Society by the International Committee of the Red Cross has been considered a near-equally powerful sign. Membership in the Olympic community by no means compares to United Nations membership – but it should be recognized as a second- or third-tier international sign of statehood. For new states, particularly in the mid-20th century, joining the Olympic community seems to have been high on the checklist of “what we do now that we are a state”. Further, focusing on Olympic membership shifts the focus from external analyses of the sovereignty of a given state and helps suggest what international community recognition was important to citizens on the ground – or at least to the political elite.

Putting great emphasis on Olympic membership and active involvement in the Olympic community was certainly the case for Lebanon, whose history with the Olympics this author has examined elsewhere.^{xiii} The research question in this study started as a comparative one: how similar was Syria’s experience with the Olympics, and how important was Olympic participation to Syria from independence through the present? The comparison with Lebanon made sense because in many ways, these two states began from sibling positions: they shared four centuries of Ottoman governance and two and a half decades of French mandate tutelage, with its

emphasis on promoting religious minorities (particularly in the military) and promoting sectarian identity as the primary one through which citizens should regard one another and the state should regard them. However, they are not the same: Syria's territory and population are five times those of Lebanon, and Syria's population diversity is tempered by having one dominant ethnicity (Arab) and religion (Sunni Muslim), while in Lebanon no ethnic or sectarian group claims a majority. Syrian and Lebanese history diverged strikingly in terms of how they as independent countries intersected with the Olympic Committee and Olympic community.

As noted above, Lebanon's involvement with the Olympic community was championed by a major Lebanese political figure, Gabriel Gemayel, as part of his lifelong interest in sports as a vehicle for promoting national identity, modern sensibilities, and health among Lebanese youth, and his passion for putting Lebanon on the international stage. (Gabriel Gemayel's better-known sibling, Pierre Gemayel, also employed sport as a vehicle in building the Kata'ib or Phalangist Party, a semi-militarized Maronite Christian political organization.^{xiv}) But in Syria, no member of the political elite served as an Olympic advocate – so Syria's engagement with the Olympics followed much more typical path for smaller, late-independence states: steady, small-scale participation that did little to raise its profile internationally. While Lebanon's affiliation with the various international sports federations that set and oversaw standards for competition began in 1936 – ten years before its independence – Syria's first affiliation, with the international football federation, came only after independence. It affiliated with the various federations more slowly than did Lebanon – and by 1973 still had no affiliations with several federations, including archery and the modern pentathlon and biathlon.^{xv} Syria's involvement with the Olympics evolved beyond its initial need for international validation, but – as suggested by its slower pace

of sports federation affiliation – it never treated international sports participation as meaningful a sign of membership in the international community as did Lebanon. Yet the conflict in Syria has led towards a renewed focus on the Olympic Games, along with other regional games, as a sign of contestations over Syrian sovereignty. Reviewing the history of Syria’s involvement with the Olympic Games helps highlight how that history is playing out anew today.

Syrian Olympic involvement: a history

Syria’s first appearance as an Olympic country came with the 1948 Olympics, held in London. In preparation for those games, IOC handbooks listing the rules and regulations for each sport were drafted, translated into French and Spanish, printed and distributed to the participating countries. Syria appears to have been allotted the minimum number: 25 copies of the general regulations, with five copies each of the handbooks for specific sports. Other countries receiving this number included Guatemala, Iran, Iraq, Korea, Lebanon, Puerto Rico, and Trinidad. Even Afghanistan received more – ten copies each of the athletics and pentathlon handbooks.^{xvi} By May 1948, most nations participating in the Games had indicated the sports for which they would field competitors. Syria, however, had not yet done so – along with a few other holdouts like Bolivia and Iran. Lebanon, for whom the 1948 Olympics was also its first, had indicated its intent to compete in four sports, including boxing, while fellow novice state Pakistan had listed six.^{xvii} In the end, Syria as noted above sent only one athlete to the 1948 Games - but the primary achievement for Syria as for other newly independent states was not medaling in the Olympics, nor even fielding a sizeable cohort, but participating. As with United Nations membership, only sovereign states made up the Olympic community – with certain exceptions like that of

Palestine, whose National Olympic Committee was recognized in 1993 and which first competed at the 1996 Summer Games in Atlanta.^{xviii}

The next several Olympics saw the young state of Syria slow to take a more active role in Olympic Games (the 1952 Helsinki Games report, for example indicated that Syria took only one handbook for each of the sports included at those Games^{xix}), but quickly becoming involved in regional politics. In 1956, as noted above, Syria declined the invitation to participate in the Melbourne Olympics as part of a broader boycott over the Suez crisis. While Egypt, Iraq, and Lebanon also boycotted those Games, they withdrew after initially accepting the host country's invitation to compete at the Games. Syria declined the initial invitation.^{xx} From 1960 until 1968, Syria competed at the Olympics together with Egypt, a partnership that outlived that of the actual United Arab Republic. Syria was a minor partner in this Olympic participation, sending only three athletes in 1960 and none in 1964, the only two summer Games in which the two countries participated as one.^{xxi} In the 1970s, Syria expanded its Olympic participation to include riding, and sent for the first time a woman competitor to the 1972 Summer Games in Munich – one of seven Syrians competing that year. Yet Syria was listed as one of only six countries competing “which had television facilities [and] did not broadcast anything” from the Munich Games.^{xxii}

The 1980s saw Syria win its first Olympic medal: a silver, in freestyle wrestling, at the 1984 Los Angeles Games – by a Syrian-American who lived in Allentown, PA. The following year saw Syria's national committee name a woman, Nour El-Houda Karfoul, as its Secretary General.^{xxiii} Karfoul had served as a member of the Syrian NOC General Secretariat for several years, had a degree in Sports Education and “served over fourteen years as Director and professor of the

Institute of Education at Damascus and Aleppo”.^{xxiv} As noted above, Syria’s great triumph at the Olympics, however, came in Atlanta in 1996, when heptathlete Ghada Shouaa won the gold medal. Incidentally, Shouaa and Atiyeh are Christians, a reminder of the multi-religious population of Syria as well as the Baathist government’s secular ideology: Christians, who during the past five decades comprised 15-10% of the overall Syrian population, are disproportionately represented in its Olympic cohorts. Syria’s third medal came in Athens in 2004, when Nasser al-Shami won a bronze in heavyweight boxing.

With respect to the Olympic Games, Syria’s story is of a country that has made little impact on the international scene. Its participation at the Olympics has been consistent but limited, and the pages of the *Olympic Review* show few contributions from Syria’s National Olympic Committee (NOC). It has never sent athletes to the Winter Games, but despite winning only three medals since 1948, it has consistently sent athletes to the Summer Games. Its involvement with the regional games, by contrast, has been much more impactful, domestically and regionally.

Regional Games: greater opportunities, higher stakes?

Syria’s involvement with Olympic-affiliated and unaffiliated regional games began almost immediately after the 1948 Olympics. Like Lebanon, it was one of the ten countries to participate in the first Mediterranean Games, which were proposed by Egypt’s National Olympic Committee and first held in Greece in 1951.^{xxv} The Mediterranean Games were organized as a “mini-Olympics” to promote Olympism around the Mediterranean region, and were held under the auspices of the International Olympic Committee as Olympic-affiliated games.^{xxvi} It was also involved from the beginning with the Pan-Arab Games, which were organized under Arab

League auspices starting in 1953 as non-Olympic regional games. (Regional games based on criteria other than geography – ethnicity, ideology, etc. – generally were not recognized by the International Olympic Committee, which promoted sport as an apolitical means of bringing people together.)^{xxvii} While the Mediterranean Games became briefly embroiled in a conflict over Israel’s participation in the Games, which came to a crisis that was patchily resolved during Lebanon’s hosting of the Games, on the whole these Games proved well able to respect the Olympic ideals of sport free from politics.^{xxviii} They were held regularly – every four years without interruption, and with a regular rotation of host countries. The Pan-Arab Games, on the other hand, faced the existential challenge of emphasizing an ethnic or linguistic identity as a supra-national identity shared by all participants, while requiring that athletes compete for their nation-state. As a result, the Arabism espoused by the Pan-Arab ideology was consistently undercut by the reality of national borders – as well as by the organizers’ willingness to include Muslim-majority non-Arab countries like Indonesia, at least until the 1965 Games.^{xxix}

Initially, Syria took home few medals at either games, but by 2001 the country had taken home the second-largest number of medals overall among Pan-Arab Games competitors – 602 to Egypt’s 814 – and the third-most gold medals, after Egypt and Morocco, in the 50 years of the Games’ existence.^{xxx} Thanks to lower thresholds for competition, it was able to send many more athletes to these games than to the Olympics – and, as Henry, Amara, and Tauqi suggest, Syria’s secular outlook and commitment to modernization served it well when it came to women athletes. The Mediterranean Arab countries dominated the medals tables in part, they suggest, because they fielded women as well as men athletes.^{xxxi} Indeed, a 1975 special report on “women and sports administration” indicated that in addition to Syria’s first woman competitor at the

1972 Munich Games, “a few women are members of national sports federations” and “the committee controlling sport in Syria also has women members.” While not suggesting unparalleled opportunities for women in sport in Syria, this information compared favorably with those of Israel and Turkey, as well as the African and South American NOCs included in the same report.^{xxxii} Further, while most Syrian NOC updates to the *Olympic Review* merely noted new committee members or changes of address, the few more substantive updates did relatively frequently focus on women. A July 1986 update, for example, noted that female athlete Azza El Abdallah was one of two recipients of Syria’s International Youth Year awards. The update included several details of her success as a table tennis competitor and described both recipients as heroes and models for others to follow.^{xxxiii}

Yet the appeal of the Mediterranean, Pan-Arab, and (starting with the 1978 Bangkok Games) Asian Games seems to have been more than the chance to swim well in a small pond.^{xxxiv} The small, late independent countries of the Middle East and southern Mediterranean appear in the 1950s and 1960s to have placed great emphasis on the role of regional games in fostering sports awareness, building national identity, and strengthening regional ties. “Even though a formal union of Arab countries ... did not succeed due to the particularistic interests of [national] leaders,” Silva and Gerber argue, “the [Arab] Games reinforced the sentiment of an Arab identity and helped to create an imagined community among the Arabs” – particularly for newly-independent or, in the 1950s, still-colonized countries.^{xxxv} Using sports to strengthen ties between people is a highly Olympic goal, although the regional contexts at times made the regional games more politicized than the full Olympic Games. Further, involvement in regional sporting events served a domestic purpose as well. In addition to encouraging good feelings and

fostering shared identities around the Arab world, Mahfoud Amara argues that “sport played an important role in Arab states’ policies in the formation of nation states and mobilization of the masses”.^{xxxvi} Hosting regional games, whether the Pan-Arab, Mediterranean, or smaller games, could provide an opportunity for domestic as well as regional political goals.

Syria did not host any major regional games in the 1950s and 1960s. However, by the 1970s, the Asad government appears to have seen investing in the major sports complexes required to host a regional game as part of a broader initiative to play a larger leadership role in the region. It also served to promote sports and physical activity among Syrians. In a recent academic work, former Syrian NOC Secretary General Nour El-Houda Karfoul has argued: “The government recognized early that to develop sport effectively in the Syrian Arab Republic there needed to be a building program of sports facilities”. The large sports complexes built in Damascus in 1976 to host the Pan-Arab Games and in Lattakia and Tartous in 1987 to host the Mediterranean Games, she suggests, helped to promote sports by becoming public facilities after the Games concluded.^{xxxvii} They also, as Middle East scholar Lisa Wedeen has argued, formed a powerful stage on which the Asad government could promote a particular national narrative: strong, united, loyal; Arab, socialist, secular.^{xxxviii} Yet without any studies of audience reaction, as Wedeen argues, the mobilization of bodies – primarily those of children involved in Baathist youth groups – to perform in the Mediterranean Games’ opening ceremony may merely have made the Asad government’s power visible – to “substantiate rather than legitimate” it.^{xxxix}

Syria and Lebanon were both substantially involved in the Mediterranean Games and the Pan-Arab Games – but to differing degrees. Perhaps unsurprisingly, given its self-description as not

an Arab country but a country with a “wajh `arabi” or Arab face,^{xi} Lebanon put greater emphasis on the Mediterranean Games, helping develop them and hosting the third Games in 1959 – as well as in 1997, its first major international commitment after the conclusion of its 15-year civil war in 1990.^{xii} Syria, by contrast, defined itself as an Arab country – including “Arab” in its official name from 1958 onward, first as the United Arab Republic and then as the Syrian Arab Republic. As a Baathist country, it defined its outlook as one of Arab socialism and as a country committed to the unity of the Arab world. Yet Syria was slower to take a leading role in the Pan-Arab Games than was Lebanon, which hosted the second Games in 1957. When Syria did increase its involvement with the Pan-Arab Games, its participation was substantial. It hosted the Games twice in less than two decades, with its first hosting in 1976 helping restart the Games after an 11 year hiatus brought on by regional instability, including domestic coups and transfers of power in countries around the region, as well as two wars with Israel. Yet the appeal of Pan-Arabism never successfully overrode national and other identities and interests, even for a state with such a strong commitment to Arabism. Hence for example Syria was pressured by Persian Gulf Arab League states, which helped finance its hosting of the 1992 Games, to dis-invite Iraq, as punishment for its 1990 invasion of Kuwait.^{xiii}

Syria also remained an active member of the Mediterranean Games community, hosting the Games in Lattakia in 1987. Lattakia has the dual advantage of being both a coastal town on the Mediterranean Sea and also a city with a strong Alawi presence. The Pan-Arab Games were hosted in Damascus, a Sunni-dominated city in the landlocked south and the center of Syrian state government – as well as the capital of the Umayyad caliphate, the first major Islamic empire. Having built the sports facilities for those Games, Syria could reasonably have chosen to

host the Mediterranean Games in Damascus. Instead, hosting the Mediterranean Games in Lattakia emphasized Syria's connection to the Mediterranean Sea and the Alawi presence in the northwestern part of the country, sending an important message domestically as well as to the international community.

The Games were politicized in another way as well. In order to host a successful Games, Syria needed all the major Mediterranean states to participate – including Turkey. As Martin Stokes notes, this provided the opportunity for Turkey to obtain Syrian government agreement that the old sanjak of Alexandretta, given to Turkey by the French in 1939, would from then on appear as Hatay in maps of Syria and the region.^{xliii} Yet even while preparing to host the Mediterranean Games, Syria's NOC emphasized its Arab-world connections. In April 1985, its *Olympic Review* update noted: "In addition to organizing the Xth Mediterranean Games ... the Syrian Olympic Committee will be hosting the Pan-Arab Student Sports Tournament in 1986" – an event that, while important for promoting youth sports, promoted ethnic rather than the Olympic-sanctioned regional identities.^{xliv} Interestingly, the last major regional Games that Syria hosted were the Arab Games again, in 1992. With Hafez al-Asad aging and facing increasingly ill health, the shift in world politics following the collapse of the USSR, the shift in regional politics following the first Gulf War, and the excitement and ultimate failure of the Oslo Accords, Syrian government priorities may naturally have turned away from regional sports events.

2000-2013: Bashar al-Asad's Syria

Bashar al-Asad inherited his father's country after Hafez died in summer 2000, having been the recognized heir-apparent since the death of his brother Bassil in a 1994 car accident. Since his

accession, the country has not hosted any major regional Games. The cost of hosting them, the aging facilities available in Damascus or Lattakia, and the shifting national and regional policy priorities under Bashar al Asad all may have contributed to making hosting a regional Games less appealing – although the younger Asad’s government could also have argued that hosting another regional games would have marked a new era for the country. Syria did host the Middle East and North Africa regional Special Olympics Games in 2010 under the patronage of Bashar al-Asad’s wife, First Lady Asma al-Akhras – joining a number of countries around the region, including Morocco and Kuwait, whose First Ladies serve as honorary chairpersons for the regional Special Olympics. Syria first began participating in the Special Olympics World Summer Games in 1995, like most of the Middle East joining the international Special Olympics community nearly twenty years after the first international Special Olympics Games were held.^{xlv} While hosting the regional Special Olympics hardly incurred the same costs as hosting regional games like the Pan-Arab Games, it provided steady, positive regional and international news coverage, as well as highlighting a community – the disabled – historically more often left in the shadows.

Bashar al-Asad’s accession to power ensured multiple continuities with his father’s policies – as well as continuity in many cases with key bureaucratic personnel. While the younger Asad spent 2005 and 2006 consolidating his authority at the highest levels, leading to the retirement, exile, or death of key Hafez al-Asad advisors Mustafa Tlas, Rustom Ghazaleh, Abdel Halim Khaddam, and Ghazi Kanaan, officials in more bureaucratic roles often continued in their position. This has been the case, for example, with Mohammed Samih Moudallal, Syria’s International Olympic Committee (IOC) member, who has held this position since his 1998 election. A former

weightlifter who competed in regional and global weightlifting competition, Moudallal led several national delegations to regional and Olympic Games, as well as serving on the International Mediterranean Games Committee, various regional sports organization boards, and as President of Syria's National Olympic Committee from 1981-2000. While the IOC directory notes that members "are representatives of the IOC in their respective countries, and not their country's delegate within the IOC",^{xlvi} in a carefully controlled state like Syria's, it is unlikely that Moudallal would have remained in such a visible, internationally recognized position without government approval. Similarly, Syria's current NOC President, General Mowafak Joumaa joined the NOC's General Secretariat in 1991.^{xlvii} Yet while Syria's focus on sports participation for youth and its commitment to participating in Olympic and regional games continued, the country disappeared almost entirely from the *Olympic Review* in the 2000s.

Conclusion: looking ahead

Since March 2011 Syria has become embroiled in an increasingly bloody conflict – described variously as a civil war or a rebellion, but certainly a contest over the future of the country, its political system, and the rights and welfare of its inhabitants. This article concludes with an effort to connect the current conflict to this study on Syria and the Olympic Games, as well as Olympic-affiliated and unaffiliated regional games. If participation in the Olympic Games appears historically to have been less important for Syria than for Lebanon, and leadership in the regional games more of an intermittent goal, why should Syria's relationship to the Olympic international sports community, as well as the various regional sports communities, loom any larger in the present moment? The key reason for the renewed focus on Syria and international amateur sports competitions is the saliency of Olympic and regional sports community

membership as signs of statehood – whether understood as the current government’s ability to maintain a monopoly of power or as the more dire question of the future of a unified Syria – in light of the current conflict in Syria. More than signaling the country’s independence as a nation-state, participation in the Olympic, Pan-Arab, and Mediterranean Games, among others, may be taken as a sign of the Asad government’s ability to maintain ‘normal’ priorities despite the conflict. Alternatively, if the Asad government’s right to represent Syria at these games is challenged – by Syrian athletes, Syrian opposition groups, host countries, or the organizing committees of the various games themselves –, the challenge would be not only to the sovereignty of Syria but to the Olympic and regional sports communities’ historic preference for political neutrality.

The 2012 London Summer Games brought a low-level but steady focus on Syria’s participation – most notably when the United Kingdom denied Syrian NOC head Mowafak Joumaa a visa to enter the country for the Summer Games, banning him on grounds that, as a member of the Syrian military, he was part of the Asad government and hence subject to United Kingdom sanctions.^{xlviii} The Syrian athletes who competed received their funding directly from the IOC, rather than through Syria’s NOC, to ensure that they were not considered part of the Asad government as well. Yet among Syrians and outside observers, questions circulated regarding whether Syrian athletes should compete in the midst of such brutal internecine conflict and, if so, under which Syrian flag. (As late as May 2012, there remained speculation in the United Kingdom that Syria’s NOC would itself be sanctioned, and that Syrian athletes would compete under the five-ring Olympic flag.^{xlix}) In the end, ten Syrians competed at the London Games, a cohort described as “the country’s biggest team since the 1980 Moscow Games”. Most appeared

to downplay the political situation while in London, explaining that they focused on their sports and did not discuss the situation in Syria.^l

This author expects the 2014 Winter Olympic Games to bring a renewed focus on discussing Syria and the international Olympic community's position regarding this conflict – in part because their host, Russia, has been a strong supporter of the Asad government.^{li} This discussion may be muted at the official level, for two reasons. First, Syria has historically participated only in the Summer Games, and has never sent an athlete to the Winter Olympic Games. This is an important point to remember: observers should not read too much into Syria's non-participation at the 2014 Sochi Games. Second, the multi-part opposition fighting the Asad government has not as of mid-2013 formed an opposition-supported National Olympic Committee for Syria. This is understandable: the opposition since 2011 has been a loose coalition of groups with widely disparate interests, whose priorities collectively and individually include obtaining international support for weapons and humanitarian aid, not organizing sports committees. As a result, the 2014 Winter Games will bring few opportunities for Syrian athletes to make statements in favor or against the Asad government to international journalists. It will also mean no chance of another incident like Joumaa's visa denial. While hardly tipping the balance with respect to the conflict in Syria, both events unsettle the international community's acceptance of Syria as a sovereign state, by putting in question the legitimacy of its government. Such incidents can prove embarrassing for the Asad government, while giving hope to opposition supporters – and causing ripple effects to both sides' various foreign backers. Further, they highlight the government's inability to maintain sovereignty across the country, which since summer 2012 has led to scholarly speculation that Syria's ultimate post-conflict fate may involve partition.^{lii}

At the popular level, however, observers will likely hear more condemnations of and threats regarding the 2014 Winter Games, made by more militant elements within the Syrian opposition, who might see the Games as an opportunity to attack Russia for its support of the Asad government. Concern over Russia's support of Syria as a reason to protest the 2014 Games may connect with a low-grade but similarly impassioned concern over Russia's decision to host the Winter Games in Sochi, historically the home of Russia's Circassian population. Circassians, who were mostly Sunni Muslim, were forcibly removed from the area in the 1860s following one of several Russian-Ottoman wars, and were settled in the Arab provinces of the Ottoman Empire – including the lands of present-day Syria.^{liii} While the Russian government has indicated that it is unconcerned by potential threats and capable of managing them without disruption to the Sochi Games, these political issues may retain their saliency throughout the Games.^{liv} They seem likely to remain intertwined, especially since Syrian Circassians trying to leave Syria continued through mid-2013 to face difficulty in obtaining Russian residency permits or citizenship.^{lv} It is also likely that Syria's international sports participation in general, and Olympic participation in particular will continue to attract political commentary – particularly via social media. Cartoons that circulate on opposition or anti-government Facebook pages, for example, have criticized the world community for not using the Olympic Games as an opportunity to chastise the Asad government, while pro-government Facebook pages in Summer 2012 offered a celebration of Syria's Olympic participation.^{lvi} Using the Olympics to help legitimize or de-legitimize the Asad government reflects in a new way its importance as a sign of statehood – today, one that denies as well as affirms.

If Syria's presence at the Olympics may continue to be a source of contestation, the same may be true of its participation in the various regional games. Syria boycotted the most recent Arab Games, which were held in Doha in December 2011, and cited the Arab League's suspension of Syria as its reason for doing so^{lvii} - although observers speculated that authorities also feared athletes defecting while in Doha^{lviii}. As non-Olympic affiliated games, boycotting the Arab Games carried no consequences. However, the Mediterranean and the Asian Games, both held under IOC patronage, might pose graver challenges for Syria and the host countries. In June 2013, Turkey hosted the XVIIth Mediterranean Games in Mersin, a town on its southeastern coast, roughly 80 miles by sea from Lattakia. Given Turkey's extensive support for Syrian refugees and Syrian opposition groups, there was speculation that Syria would boycott these Games. Alternatively, it was mooted that the Turkish government might allow Syrian athletes to compete while, like the Arab League, allowing members of the Syrian National Council – the leading opposition coalition – to represent the country officially. Ultimately, Syria participated in eight events, under the Baathist Syrian Arab Republic flag. It placed 18 out of 21 nations competing, winning two silver medals for weightlifting “despite all the odds stacked against the team”, as an English-language Turkish publication stated.^{lix} Would Syria have been censured for withdrawing from these Games? Would Turkey have been censured for disallowing Syria to compete under the Asad government? The 13th Arab Games are scheduled to be held in Beirut in 2015. With Lebanon as of July 2013 reeling under domestic instability brought on in part by its political parties' differing stances on the Syrian conflict and by the addition of one million Syrian refugees, how will Syria's participation in those Games impact Syrians – and Lebanese?

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ⁱ Due to the conflict and the ethnic / religious population shifts that it has engendered, these numbers may no longer be accurate. One source for updated demographic information is the CIA World Factbook, available online at:

<https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/sy.html>.

ⁱⁱ Syria was listed as one of five countries or territories approved for membership in the Olympic community during the 1948 Winter Olympic Games, along with Colombia, Lebanon, Pakistan, and Puerto Rico. See Bill Henry, "After the Games of the XIVth Olympiad: London 1948", *Olympic Review* 13 (November 1949), 21-23. Chourbagi published several studies of Syria's sports and physical education in the late 1960s, reflecting the policies of the early Baathist state. See for example Zouheir Chourbagi, "Physical Education and Sports in Syria", *International Review for the Sociology of Sport* 3 (1968), 197-198.

ⁱⁱⁱ The official London 2012 Olympic Games website states that Syria's largest Olympic contingent was 67 athletes, sent to compete at the 1980 Moscow Olympics. See: <http://www.london2012.com/country/syria/profile/index.html>. The country sent only one athlete to several summer Games, including the 1988 Seoul Summer Games.

^{iv} Article 23, Section 3 of the 1973 Constitution of the Syrian Arab Republic states: "Physical education is a foundation for the building of society. The state encourages physical education to form a physically, mentally, and morally strong generation." For the full text of the Syrian constitution, see:

http://www.law.yale.edu/rcw/rcw/jurisdictions/asw/syrianarabrep/syria_constitution.htm.

^v The *Olympic Review* serves as the official voice of the International Olympic Committee, providing updates from the National Olympic Committees, articles on issues of interest to the Olympic community, contact information for IOC members, and news regarding upcoming or recently held Olympic and affiliated Games. For a more detailed discussion of the *Olympic Review*, please see: Andrea L Stanton, "'Pioneer of Olympism In the Middle East': Gabriel Gemayel and Lebanese Sport", *International Journal of the History of Sport* 2012 *iFirst*, 1-16.

^{vi} Stanton, "Pioneer of Olympism In the Middle East".

^{vii} For a study of the actualization of this term in the early post-World War I period, see Michael Provence, *The Great Syrian Revolt and the Rise of Arab Nationalism* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2005).

^{viii} Scholars have debated the meaning and execution of the various provisions included in the famous "Pact of Omar". See for example Anver M. Emon, *Religious Pluralism and Islamic Law: Dhimmis and Others in the Empire of Law* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 70-72.

^{ix} Numerous good historical studies cover this period. For Lebanon, see Kais Firro, *Inventing Lebanon: Nationalism and the State Under the Mandate* (London: IB Tauris, 2002), and Kamal Salibi, *A House of Many Mansions: The History of Lebanon Reconsidered*

(Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990). For an overview of the region's history in the twentieth century, see Mehran Kamrava, *The Modern Middle East: A Political History Since the First World War* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005). For a readable general history of the World War I era, see David Fromkin, *A Peace to End all Peace: The Fall of the Ottoman Empire and the Creation of the Modern Middle East* (New York: Holt Paperbacks, 2001).

^x Two good general histories of twentieth-century Syria include Patrick Seale, *The Struggle for Syria* (London: IB Tauris, 1986) and Nikolaos van Dam, *The Struggle for Power in Syria Politics and Society under Asad and the Ba`th Party* (London / New York: IB Tauris, 2011). For a good study of French minority politics during the Mandate era, see Benjamin White, *The Emergence of Minorities in the Middle East: The Politics of Community in French Mandate Syria* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2011).

^{xi} For Palestine, see: Andrea L. Stanton, *This is Jerusalem Calling: State Radio in Mandate Palestine* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2013). For Lebanon, see Stanton, "Pioneer of Olympism", 5.

^{xii} Geoffrey Best, *Humanity in Warfare*: (New York: Columbia University Press, 1983).

^{xiii} Stanton, "Pioneer of Olympism".

^{xiv} See among others Michael Johnson, *All Honorable Men: The Social Origins of War in Lebanon* (London / New York: IB Tauris, 2001), 147-9.

^{xv} "Dates of Affiliation of the National Federations to the ISF", *Olympic Review* S73 (Special Congress), 372-3.

^{xvi} "General Regulations and Sports Handbooks", *The Official Report of the Organizing Committee for the XIV Olympiad* (London: Organizing Committee for the XIV Olympiad, 1948/1951), 64-65.

^{xvii} "Olympic Games London 1948: 58 Countries Accept", *Bulletin du Comité International Olympique* 10 (May 1948), p. 14.

^{xviii} Bill Mallon and Jeroen Heijmans, *Historical Dictionary of the Olympic Movement* (Plymouth, UK: Scarecrow Press, 2011), 291.

^{xix} Many smaller countries also received only one handbook per sport; Lebanon took two each for boxing, shooting, and wrestling, but one for each of the remaining sports. The USSR and the United States took five handbooks for each sport and ten each for athletics. See: *The Official Report of the Organising Committee for the Games of the XV Olympiad, Helsinki 1952* (Porvoo, Finland: Werner Soderstrom Osakeyhtio, 1955), 34-5.

^{xx} See: *The Official Report of the Organizing Committee for the Games of the XVI Olympiad, Melbourne 1956* (Melbourne: WM Houston, Government Printer, 1958), 37.

^{xxi} The IOC provisionally recognized their joint National Olympic Committee in August 1960. See "Extract of the Minutes of the 57th Session of the International Olympic Committee", *Olympic Review* 72 (November 1960), 62. Lebanon's Pierre Gemayel and Romania's Alexandru Siperco spoke in favor of the new NOC. My thanks to one of the anonymous reviewers for bringing to my attention that Syria and Egypt also participated in the 1963 Games of the briefly-lived Games of the New Emerging Forces (GANEF0), which drew IOC censure for having inappropriately linked amateur sports and international politics.

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- xxii "The Awarding of Television Rights", *The Official Report of the Organizing Committee for the Games of the XXth Olympiad, Munich, 1972*, Volume I: The Organization (Pro Sport Munchen, no date), 62.
- xxiii "Syria", *Olympic Review* 209 (March 1985), 207.
- xxiv Ibid.
- xxv "Sport in Africa and the Middle East", in *International Sport Management*, edited by Mind Li, Eric W. MacIntosh, and Gonzalo A. Bravo (Champaign, IL: Human Kinetics, 2012), 174.
- xxvi Stanton, "Pioneer of Olympism", 6-11.
- xxvii Although the International Olympic Committee did not recognize the Pan-Arab Games, Henry, Amara, and Tauqi note that the IOC "did not show any objection" to their formation. See Ian Henry, Mahfoud Amara, and Mansour al-Tauqi, "Sport, Arab Nationalism, and the Pan-Arab Games", *International Review for the Sociology of Sport* 38 (3), 2003, 295-310.
- xxviii For more on this issue see Allen Guttman, *The Olympics: A History of the Modern Games* (Champaign, IL: University of Illinois Press, 1992, 2000), 78-80. Syria later lodged a protest with the International Basketball Federation over Israel's intent to compete in the 1957 basketball world championships, on the grounds of its non-participation in the Mediterranean Games; the request was denied. See "Extract of the Minutes, Meeting of the Executive Board of the International Olympic Committee with Delegates from International Federations", *Olympic Review* 60 (November 1957), 54.
- xxix For a brief history of the Pan-Arab Games, as well as further evidence of their important but contradictory goals, see Luis Henrique Rolim Silva and Hans-Dieter Gerber, "Our Games! The Pan-Arab Games (1953-1965)," *International Journal of the History of Sport* 29 (15), 2099-2114.
- xxx Henry, Amara, and Tauqi, 303.
- xxxi Ibid.
- xxxii "Women and Sports Administration Part 2: The NOCs", *Olympic Review* 99-100 (January-February 1976), 39.
- xxxiii "Syria", *Olympic Review* 225 (July 1986), 422-3.
- xxxiv "All the Asian countries that took part in the London Olympics" – Iran, Iraq, Lebanon, and Syria – were invited to participate in the 1948 organizing meeting for the Asian Games, although none sent representatives to the meeting. See: "The First Asian Games Championships will be held in March 1951 at New Delhi", *Olympic Review* 25 (January 1951), 23. While Iran competed in the Asian Games from its inception in 1951, most Middle Eastern countries began competing at the 1978 Bangkok Games, the 1982 New Delhi Games, or the 1986 Seoul Games. For a comprehensive overview of each participating country's history at the Asian Games, see: <http://www.ocasia.org/Game/GamesL1.aspx?9QoyD9QEWPeJ2ChZBk5tvA==>
- xxxv Silva and Gerber, "Our Games!", 2110.
- xxxvi Mahfoud Amara, "Olympic Sport and Internationalism Debates in the Arab-Muslim World", in *Internationalism in the Olympic Movement: Idea and Reality between Nations, Cultures, and People*, edited by Holger Preuss and Karsten Liese (Wiesbaden: VS Verlag für Sozialwissenschaften, 2011), 37-52.
- xxxvii Nour El-Houda Karfoul, "Women and Sport in Syria", in *Muslim Women and Sport*, edited by Tansin Benn, Gertrud Pfister, and Haifaa Jawad (New York: Routledge, 2011), 149.

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- xxxviii Lisa Wedeen, *Ambiguities of Domination: Politics, Rhetoric, and Symbols in Contemporary Syria* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999), 20-24.
- xxxix Wedeen, 21.
- xl Marwan Kraidy, *Hybridity, or the Cultural Logic of Globalization* (Philadelphia: <http://www.amazon.com/Milestones-Seyyid-Qutb/dp/0934905142> Temple University Press, 2005), 117.
- xli Stanton, "Pioneer of Olympism", 6-11.
- xlii Henry, Amara, and Tauqi, 304.
- xliii Martin Stokes, "Imagining 'the South': Hybridity, Heterotopias and Arabesk on the Turkish-Syrian Border", in *Border Identities: Nation and State at International Frontiers*, edited by Thomas M. Wilson and Hastings Donnan (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 265.
- xliv "Syria", *Olympic Review* 210 (April 1985), 278.
- xlv For more on the history of the Special Olympics and the current activities of the Special Olympics community, see: <http://www.specialolympics.org/history.aspx>.
- xlvi See: <http://www.olympic.org/content/the-ioc/the-ioc-institution/ioc-members-list/?sort=noc>.
- xlvii "Syria," *Olympic Review* 286 (August 1991), 405.
- xlviii "Syria Olympics Chief General Mowaffak Joumaa 'refused visa'", *Independent*, 6.22.12, <http://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/home-news/syria-olympics-chief-general-mowaffak-joumaa-refused-visa-7876261.html>.
- xlix Jacquelin Magnay, "Syrian Athletes may Compete under Neutral, Five-Ring Olympics Flag", *Telegraph*, 5.30.12, <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/sport/olympics/9299502/London-2012-Olympics-Syrian-athletes-may-compete-under-neutral-five-ring-Olympics-flag.html>.
- ¹ Nicholas Cecil, "Syrian Athletes Make the Most of Games While Civil War Rages On", 8.3.12, <http://www.independent.co.uk/sport/olympics/news/london-2012-syrian-athletes-make-the-most-of-games-while-civil-war-rages-on-8005272.html>.
- ^{li} While at least one human rights scholar has proposed boycotting the 2014 Winter Games because of Russia's support of the Asad government in Syria (see Kyle Matthews, "Boycott Sochi Olympics in the Name of Syria", *Deutsche Welle*, 6.21.12, <http://www.dw.de/boycott-sochi-olympics-in-the-name-of-syria/a-16038278>), as of July 2013 this proposal appeared to have gained little traction.
- ^{lii} See for example Dilip Hiro, "Is Partition a Solution for Syria?", 7.31.12, <http://yaleglobal.yale.edu/content/partition-solution-syria>.
- ^{liii} See for example Kemal Karpat, "The Status of the Muslim under European Rule: The Eviction and Settlement of the Cerkes" and "Ottoman Immigration Policies and Settlement in Palestine", in *Studies on Ottoman Social and Political History: Selected Articles and Essays* (Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2002), 647-675 and 783-802.
- ^{liv} See for example the Associated Press story "Russia: Rebels no Threat to Olympics", Fox Sports News, 6.21.13, <http://msn.foxsports.com/olympics/story/russiann-rebels-will-pose-no-risk-to-sochi-olympics-062113>.
- ^{lv} See for example "Sochi Olympics awakens Circassian anger", *CBC News*, 8.14.12, <http://www.cbc.ca/news/world/story/2012/08/09/f-sochi-olympics-russia-circassians.html> or "Syria's Circassians caught in crossfire", *Al-Monitor*, 11.21.12,

<http://www.al-monitor.com/pulse/politics/2012/11/after-clashes-syrias-circassians-nervously-plan-escape-routes.html>.

^{lvi} See for example Syrian Revolution Caricature, with cartoons primarily in Arabic:

www.facebook.com/Syrian.Revolution.Caricature.

^{lvii} See for example “Syria to send 10 athletes to London”, *Daily Star*, 5.15.12,

<http://www.dailystar.com.lb/Sports/Olympics/2012/May-15/173488-syria-to-send-10-athletes-to-london-olympics.ashx#axzz2QZP1B5br>.

^{lviii} See for example Arieih O’Sullivan, “Syrian athletes may yet attend Arab Games”,

Jerusalem Post, 11.16.11, <http://www.jpost.com/Middle-East/Syrian-athletes-may-yet-attend-Arab-Games>.

^{lix} “Syria to take part in 2013 Mediterranean Games in Mersin”, *Haberler*, 6.12.13,

<http://en.haberler.com/syria-to-take-part-in-2013-mediterranean-games-in123456789-279729/>. See the official 17th Mediterranean Games website,

<http://www.mersin2013.gov.tr/>, for details on the Games and each country’s performance.